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ABSTRACT

The document deals with two major issues relating to the individualized education program (IEP) process in Utah--compliance with P.L. 94-142 (the Education for All Handicapped Children Act) by local districts and the state's role in monitoring such compliance; and the development, implementation, and review of IEPs and the state's position with respect to assisting local districts in moving toward exemplary practice in these areas. Six sections address the following topics: IEP compliance and the monitoring process, IEP definitions for annual goals and short term objectives, qualitative issues relating to the IEP, the IEP as a concept, structure of the IEP process, and best practice standards in terms of distinguishing between the letter and the spirit of the law. Appended is a page of goals and objectives designed as acceptable examples of the definitions presented. (Author/SBH)

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Monitoring the IEP Process for Quality and Compliance: A Resource for Utah

June 1979

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U. S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare
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Preface

The following document endeavors to answer two questions facing educators in Utah: 1) How should local and state level professionals view IEP compliance? and 2) How does one define a quality IEP process? A task force was organized for the purpose of constructing a resource to answer these questions. This task force provided their most appreciated insights and input to Dr. Hill Walker of the University of Oregon and Stevan J. Kukic of the Southwest Regional Resource Center (SRRC), who then developed this document with the editorial assistance of Mrs. Jean Moore of the SRRC. The task force consisted of:

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Introduction

As noted in the preface, this document deals with two major issues relating to the Individualized Education Program (IEP) process in Utah. The first issue concerns IEP compliance by local districts and the state's role in monitoring such compliance. The second concerns qualitative issues relating to the development, implementation and review of IEPs, and the state's position with respect to assisting local districts in moving toward exemplary practice in these areas.

The following topics are discussed in the remainder of the document:

(1) IEP Compliance and the Monitoring Process
(2) IEP Definitions for Annual Goals and Short Term Objectives
(3) Qualitative Issues Relating to the IEP
(4) The IEP as a Concept
(5) Structure of the IEP Process
(6) Distinguishing Between the Letter and the Spirit of the Law; Best Practice Standards

IEP Compliance and the Monitoring Process

There has been considerable debate and discussion around the issue of the state's role in monitoring the IEP process. The crucial issue in this debate has been whether the state should monitor for compliance only or for quality of planning and implementation efforts as well. This issue was discussed at length by task force members with the resulting consensus that the state's role in monitoring should be limited to compliance only. Quality control issues relating to the planning and implementation process were viewed as the responsibility of local districts. However, the state is regarded as having a legitimate role to play in providing technical assistance to school districts in order to improve capability both in the preparation and implementation of IEPs.

In terms of IEP compliance monitoring, the state's role is limited to the following conditions:

(1) insuring that an IEP is in place for each handicapped child who meets state eligibility criteria
(2) insuring that the IEP document is legally correct and meets the letter of the law
(3) insuring that the statement of annual goals and short term objectives contained in the IEP document corresponds to the definitional and structural requirements to be presented in the next section.

IEP Definitions for Annual Goals and Short Term Objectives

The purpose of this section of the document is to present task force delineated and state approved definitions of annual goals and short term objectives for the IEP document. These definitions will be used as bases for monitoring local school district compliance with these two elements of the IEP and as such represent state mandated standards. Some general guidelines are also presented for preparing annual goals and short term objectives that would: (a) comply with minimum state standards of quality and correctness and (b) be sufficiently flexible to take into account varying situations and conditions existing among school districts.

IEP documents in place for each handicapped child are expected to meet the following working definitions for annual goals and short term objectives:

> Annual Goals: A general statement of a child's expected achievement in an area of learning which relates directly to identified needs (Examples--Appendix A, p. 16).
>
> Short Term Objectives: A measurable statement of progress toward an annual goal (Examples--Appendix A, p. 16).

Annual Goals: Annual goals are viewed as terminal objectives that can be reasonably achieved within the span of a single school year. Annual goals should be tied directly to the assessment process and should specifically address major areas of deficit, responding to needs identified either in the initial referral process and/or in the assessment process. That is, if a child is referred for displaying aggressive behavior on the playground, in the hallways and in the lunchroom and qualifies for services, annual goals should directly address the child's social behavior within these settings. Too often, such children are placed in special or resource classrooms and given instruction primarily for academic deficits. In such instances, the child's needs are not really being addressed or met. Annual goals should be defined broadly but should address each of the elements of the definition presented above. These are:

(1) an expected level of achievement or progress (which can be achieved in one school year)
(2) in a specific area of learning or performance
(3) which relate directly to identified needs.

Depending upon the type of child performance involved, annual goals can assume at least two major forms. They can be:

(1) a summative prediction regarding qualitative changes in child performance that are expected to occur within a year given implementation of an agreed upon plan of service; or

(2) specification of the approximate number of skills that will be attained over the span of a school year by a child, given implementation of an agreed upon place of service.

An example of the first type of annual goal statement would be as follows:

> Annual Goal: "Will display a cooperative pattern of social behavior in all school settings that is within the normal range of expectancy."

An example of the second type of annual goal statement would be:

> Annual Goal: "Will progress through age appropriate skills on the Perkins/Welch Affective Curriculum Guide."

Other variations of the form of annual goal statements would be acceptable as long as they addressed the three elements of the definition outlined above. The intent of the task force was to define annual goals in a broad fashion in order to allow for a variety of options that would fall within the range of acceptability. The following general guidelines may be useful in preparing annual goal statements:

- Annual goals should be general in scope but specific enough to focus instruction in curricular areas.
- Annual goals should grow out of assessment data relating to a child's past, current and projected performance.
- The relationship between annual goals and short term objectives should be carefully specified so that achievement of all short term objectives relating to an annual goal would mean automatic achievement of that goal.
- Annual goals should be more than simply a designation of performance within a curricular area--they should reflect anticipated growth, progress or achievement within instructional areas (The National Learning Resource Center of Pennsylvania, 1978).

Short Term Objectives: Short term objectives are viewed as interim measures that define incremental units of progress or growth toward achievement of an annual goal. A number of short term objectives are usually subsumed under each annual goal. Short term objectives usually correspond to the amount of progress toward achievement of an annual goal that could be expected within a segment of an academic year. The key feature of short term objectives is that they represent measurable units of progress toward achievement of an annual goal.

The following general guidelines should be considered in writing short term objectives:

- Short term objectives are derived from annual goals in each instructional area.

- Short term objectives should specify learning tasks that will show whether or not progress is being made toward achieving the annual goal.

- A sufficient number of short term objectives should be identified for each annual goal to guide the instructional process.

- The sequencing of short term objectives should be logically consistent and take into account the nature and characteristics of the child's performance.

- Short term objectives should be stated in behavioral terms.

- The evaluation procedures for determining achievement of short term objectives should be adequately described and objective in nature (The National Learning Resource Center of Pennsylvania, 1978).

An important point concerning short term objectives contained in the IEP is that they are units or measures of progress and not instructional objectives designed to facilitate child performance of an academic or non-academic task. This issue will be dealt with at greater length in a later section.

Qualitative Issues Relating to the IEP

Perhaps the ultimate qualitative standard for judging the efficacy of the IEP process is the extent to which it provides delivery of appropriate services to handicapped children--services that are maximally facilitative of child achievement, adjustment and development. The original congressional mandate relating to the IEP provision of P.L. 94-142 is clearly consistent with this qualitative standard. Examination of congressional debate on the IEP provision of P.L. 94-142 suggests that Congress envisioned the development of accountable, individualized IEPs, with full parental participation, that would directly impact both upon the delivery of child services and child growth and development.

The state's position on this issue is to mandate compliance with the requirements of the IEP process, including compliance with the definitional standards for annual goals and short term objectives presented earlier and to encourage quality rather than to attempt to mandate it. This encouragement process includes developing guidelines and standards

that local districts can use as measures of their efforts to achieve such quality and providing technical assistance to districts, including inservice training, to assist them in improving the quality of IEP planning processes, the IEP document and implementation of the IEP. In this context, the next two sections deal with developing a viable concept of the IEP for the state of Utah and present an IEP planning structure for consideration by local districts.

In the final section of the document, some guidelines are presented for the purpose of assisting districts in the tasks of distinguishing between IEPs that comply with the letter of the law versus IEPs that would achieve the spirit or intent of the law. In addition, a series of best practice standards relating to IEP planning, the resulting document and implementation practices are presented for consideration.

The IEP as a Concept

The IEP is viewed as a vehicle for developing an individually tailored special education program for each handicapped child and as providing a general structure for the specification, delivery and review of educational and related services contained in the plan. The IEP is regarded as a dynamic; the basis for a planning, implementation and review process which insures that each handicapped child's needs are systematically considered on an individual basis and that services will be available to respond to such needs.

Handicapped children are seen as the ultimate responsibility of the full educational system. In this context, special education provides a service to the regular educational system in terms of (a) serving as an advocate for the needs of handicapped children, (b) working cooperatively with all aspects of the educational system to develop the best and most appropriate program for such children, and (c) providing both technical assistance and supportive services to regular educators and other service providers in responding to child needs. It is essential that the IEP process be viewed as a total school and district effort and not the unique purview of special education. Consequently, IEP planning and implementation processes should reflect this view at the local district level.

The IEP is also a legal document which satisfies requirements mandated at both federal and state levels and is simultaneously an instrument for serving the needs of handicapped children. The IEP process (and resulting document) serves the following functions:

(1) lays the groundwork for developing a comprehensive plan of service
(2) suggests an instructional plan
(3) serves as a vehicle for communication
(4) provides a basis for resource allocation

(5) provides for parent involvement in decision making
(6) is a management tool
(7) serves as a program evaluation instrument
(8) provides a formal means for the advocacy of handicapped children within the educational system, and
(9) provides a basis for monitoring compliance (Engleman, 1979).

It is recognized that the degree or extent to which each of these functions is realized in any given school situation is mediated by a host of school related factors, e.g., level of available resources, administrative and service delivery arrangements, and so forth.

The viability of the IEP concept depends greatly upon the extent to which it has an impact on (a) the appropriateness of services which a child contacts, and (b) the nature and quality of the interactions occurring between the handicapped child and service providers within educational service settings. That is, the IEP should impact upon the instructional processes applied to handicapped children in ways that are maximally facilitative of child achievement, development and adjustment. Development of an IEP which satisfies the basic legal requirements of the law (paper compliance) will not necessarily result in achievement of these two goals. An individualized implementation plan (IIP), perhaps supervised and coordinated by an IEP case manager, would maximize the chances of achieving consistently desirable outcomes in these two goal areas. A planning model is presented below which describes relationships between the IEP as a process and the achievement of such outcomes.

Structure of the IEP Process

The IEP structure to be described below assumes that it is possible to develop direct relationships between elements of the IEP process and the resulting interactions that occur between teachers and students in the implementation process. Three sequential levels of planning are conceptualized as being necessary to achieve desirable teacher-student interactions in the instructional-implementation process. These are: (1) the IEP, (2) the IIP and (3) lesson planning. Each planning level sets the stage for the one following and defines elements and tasks that must be attended to in the implementation process. The diagram below depicts relationships between these planning levels and implementation, e.g., desirable teacher-child interactions leading to goal attainment.

A Model for the IEP Process: Tying Planning to Interaction

Planning: Stage One	Planning: Stage Two	Planning: Stage Three	Implementation
The IEP: Development of a comprehensive plan of service to include annual goals and short term objectives	The IIP: Development of an Individualized Implementation Plan to include short term objectives as a basis for lesson planning	Lesson Planning: Development of daily objectives based on the IIP	Teacher-child or other professional-child interactions based on established daily objectives.

If comprehensive planning, and correlated implementation and review activities are carried out at each of the three stages listed above, the probability is greatly improved that teacher-child interactions which occur during implementation will achieve desired goals and objectives. A key feature of this model is that planning activities become increasingly specific and focused as one moves through the planning stages. The more specific and focused the planning, the more likely it is that such efforts will impact upon teacher-child interactions. A second key feature of the model is that the goal of the IEP process and of all associated planning activities is to have an impact upon the instructional process that occurs via teacher-child interactions. Thus legal or paper compliance with required elements of the IEP process is not seen as the primary goal for planning activities. If direct impact upon the instructional process is seen as the end product of the IEP, then the approach of child study teams to the planning process is likely to be different than if strict legal compliance were the goal. Finally, it is important to note that the planning stages are sequential and interdependent. The quality and comprehensiveness of planning efforts occurring at one level have a direct effect on those occurring at the next level. In a summative or collective sense, the three planning levels contribute equally to successful teacher-child interaction.

The model is also seen as functionally useful for the annual review process. In the planning/implementation process, the flow of activities is from the IEP through the IIP and Lesson Planning stages such that teacher-child interactions are affected in a way that hopefully contributes to child growth and development. In the annual review, this flow would be reversed. That is, child performance would be

reviewed initially in terms of daily objectives, the impact that they have upon the achievement of short term objectives and finally whether annual goals were actually realized.

In this context, both annual goals and short term objectives are seen as statements of expected child progress projected over an academic year and segments thereof respectively. It is recognized that such projections are based upon the collective judgments of members of a child study team and, as such, are subject to errors of estimation. Failure to realize achievement of either short term objectives or annual goals based upon them may be in whole or part, a result of errors in the estimation process. Such a result could also be due to breakdowns in the implementation process or to an interaction between goal setting and implementation processes. While it is important to consider such explanatory factors, it should be noted that perhaps the most important functions of the IEP process are that it:

(1) provides for careful goal setting (both long and short term) of an individualized nature
(2) sets the stage for development of an IIP and more specific plans designed to achieve IEP goals and objectives
(3) provides a structure for the annual review.

The IIP is an individualized implementation plan that develops general strategies and procedures for achieving IEP goals and objectives. Its focus is upon planning for implementation--not upon estimating child progress. It contains specific analyses of services, techniques, and materials leading to the achievement of short term objectives and in turn annual goals (provided there is a strong relationship between the two estimates of child progress The IIP, together with the IEP, form a total service plan which provides for the specification and remediation of child deficits. However, to achieve its overall goal of impacting upon teacher-child interaction, a third step is required, i.e., the development of lesson plans containing daily objectives.

This third planning stage, Lesson Planning, specifies the exact instructional techniques that will be used to achieve implementation of IIP elements (specifically, strategies and procedures). Lesson planning identifies daily objectives, techniques, materials and resources that will be used to directly facilitate the child's goal attainment and, as such, relates directly to teacher-student interactions that occur continuously in the instructional-implementation process. The detail, quality and comprehensiveness of lesson planning is a critical determinant of whether desirable child outcomes are achieved as a result of the overall planning process.

Careful attention to these three elements is crucial toward insuring satisfactory impact upon teacher-child interactions and in achieving desirable child outcomes. If these three stages of planning are

carefully and appropriately addressed, the level and quality of services delivered to handicapped children may be significantly improved. Examples of this planning strategy, in terms of annual goals, short term objectives and daily objectives are presented in Appendix A (p. 16). These examples of goals and objectives are consistent with previously described definitions.

Distinguishing Between the Letter and the Spirit of the Law; Best Practice Standards

In an effort by the Special Education Section of the Offices of the State Board of Education to provide technical assistance regarding the quality dimension of the IEP process, the following material is presented which local districts may wish to consider in their efforts at improving capability in the IEP process. It should be noted that the general guidelines presented earlier relating to the IEP as a concept and the model which ties planning processes to teacher-child interactions are positions which the state encourages local districts to adopt. However, they are not mandatory and not subject to the compliance monitoring process.

The Letter Versus the Spirit of the Law: Defining an IEP process that meets the letter of the law, i.e., "paper compliance," is a relatively easy task. However, defining one that meets both the letter and the spirit of the law is a somewhat arbitrary process that is subject to considerable interpretation. Thus, its characteristics are clearly open to question, debate and disagreement.

It should be noted also that an IEP process meeting both the letter and the spirit of the law as presented here, may exceed the available resources and services that can be delivered in some LEAs. Staffing and manpower needs would likely also be insufficient to implement this IEP process in many LEAs. It is possible that effective implementation of the IEP provision in some LEAs will require a substantially greater allocation of funds by federal and state sources than is currently projected under P.L. 94-142.

Walker (1978) attempted to distinguish between IEPs meeting the letter versus the spirit of the law as part of an analysis of the IEP process, sponsored by the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped.

An IEP Meeting the Letter of the Law: An IEP corresponding to the letter of the law has the following characteristics:

(1) provides "paper compliance" with the IEP provision requirements
(2) is an educational plan tailored individually to a handicapped child's needs and designates services that will be provided

(3) provides a record of strategies to be used in achieving IEP goals and objectives
(4) provides a record of resources to be allocated in the delivery of services; and
(5) is a legal document that must be completed before special education and related services can be made available to a handicapped child.

Development and implementation of the plan is viewed as a dynamic process which addresses all of the required elements of the IEP process as specified in the final regulations of P.L. 94-142. However, this process does not specify qualitative standards to be adhered to in addressing each element--only that they be attended to in the planning process.

An IEP Corresponding to the Letter and the Spirit of the Law: An IEP process meeting the letter and the spirit of the law would incorporate all the characteristics described above corresponding to the letter of the law and in addition, would:

(1) be a comprehensive educational plan based upon a thorough diagnostic assessment of the handicapped child's functioning
(2) contain a statement of the child's current and projected needs
(3) serve as a guide to instruction
(4) produce a comprehensive plan of service containing guidelines and procedures for implementation and instruction, and
(5) contain those additional IEP elements written into the proposed regulations but eliminated from the final regulations, e.g., specifying media and materials to be used, the type of physical education program to be provided, the individuals responsible for implementing the plan and finally justifying the placement decision.

An IEP process meeting the letter and the spirit of the law should specify all of a handicapped child's service needs (proposed regulations) rather than simply listing the services to be provided (final regulations). There has been some confusion over the correct interpretation of this issue. However, Martin (1977) in an informal letter to chief state school officers, indicated that in spite of the language differences between the proposed and final regulations on this issue, LEAs are still obligated to specify a handicapped child's needs even though services may not be available to respond to all of them.

The major difference between IEPs meeting the letter of the law versus IEPs meeting the letter and the spirit of the law is, thus, evident. The latter, which represents a total service approach with

an implementation/instructional plan (IIP) for each short term objective listed on the IEP, meets both the letter and the spirit of the law because it goes beyond the level of individualized and careful planning and attends in considerable detail to the teaching-implementation process. This is a crucial difference in the two processes. The latter process is likely to have a significantly greater impact in achieving the ultimate criterion of a good IEP, i.e., the degree to which it facilitates student progress.

Implementation of these respective IEP processes is likely to have very different effects upon the educational practice of LEAs. The effects of IEP processes meeting the letter versus the letter and the spirit of the law would be reflected in the following areas:

(1) investment of time and resources
(2) organizational and planning functions
(3) thoroughness of assessment
(4) group process and decision making
(5) quality of services delivered and monitored over time
(6) student adjustment and achievement.

Achievement of the letter and the spirit of the IEP process will require the investment of a significantly greater level of resources and services. The approach to assessment, planning, decision making and program monitoring in this process is designed to produce an exemplary educational program that will have the maximum possible impact upon a handicapped child's progress. This will require the organization and coordination of extensive staff expertise in the planning, decision making and implementation processes. However, the benefits accruing to the handicapped child should be well worth such an investment.

Hopefully, the above analysis offers some guidelines and criteria that local districts may find useful in distinguishing between IEP compliance and quality. Certainly an IEP process meeting the letter and the spirit of the law, as outlined by Walker (1978), represents exemplary educational pratice but perhaps is not currently attainable by a majority of school districts in the state of Utah. Nevertheless, such guidelines are useful as goal statements or standards of practice toward which to strive. Best practice standards based on these guidelines follow.

Best Practice Standards: A series of best practice standards are presented for the reader's consideration in the areas of (a) IEP planning, (b) the IEP document and (c) implementation practices. These standards are consistent with an IEP process which meets both the letter and the spirit of the law.

IEP Planning
Best Practice Standards

I. Initial Identification and Screening

A. All children should be screened on a regular basis to identify eligible handicapped children (referral agents should be given inservice training in observation, coding and rating of child behavior).

B. All handicapped children currently receiving services should be reviewed on a regular basis to determine whether they are being underserved by special education.

II. Referral. Establish a case manager's approach or structure to:

A. Expedite referrals to special education

B. Provide assistance to the referral source when referrals are not being made.

III. Diagnosis and Assessment. Conduct assessment activities to:

A. Determine child's eligibility

B. Provide a basis for developing a prescriptive educational plan that will be responsive to a child's needs.

IV. Development of an IEP

A. Develop a comprehensive plan of service consisting of an IEP based upon thorough diagnostic information and an IIP for each objective contained in the IEP.

B. Involve parents as significant information providers and decision makers in the IEP development process.

C. Involve the child on a private individual basis in the IEP development process unless circumstances indicate otherwise.

V. Evaluation of the IEP. Schedule both formative and summative evaluation functions into the IEP evaluation process. Review meetings should be held on a schedule determined by individual student needs.

The IEP Document
Best Practice Standards

I. Insure that diagnostic information used to develop the IEP yields direct implications for teaching and programming efforts.

II. Insure that there is a logical, consistent relationship between annual goals, short term objectives and the strategies used to achieve them.

III. Develop a comprehensive IIP for short term objectives of the IEP.

IV. Insure that annual goals and short term objectives are written in behavioral terms.

V. Consider multiple types and sources of evaluation in assessing the impact of IEPs, e.g., context, input, process and product evaluation.

VI. Develop a defensible rationale for the placement decision reached in relation to each handicapped child to whom services are given.

VII. Insure that the comprehensive plan of service is written in a way that serves as a true guide to instruction.

IEP Implementation
Best Practices Standards

I. Appoint an IEP manager to coordinate implementation of the comprehensive plan of service.

II. Insure that instructional/intervention procedures are applied systematically to all areas of child functioning in which growth or change is expected.

III. Use both direct and indirect instructional/intervention procedures whenever appropriate and feasible.

IV. Use systematic motivational procedures to facilitate child achievement and improvement whenever appropriate.

V. Build in formal procedures to insure the generalization and persistence of achieved treatment effects whenever possible.

VI. Insure that the implementation efforts of all personnel involved in the IEP process are systematically coordinated.

VII. Be aware of and prepared to deal with the impact of attitudinal and philosophical objections upon the educational practice of teachers and other service providers.

Measuring Progress Toward Achieving Exemplary Educational Practice:
In the event that local districts have an interest in measuring their

progress along the dimensions of quality addressed by the above best practice standards, self study guides could be developed for this purpose by assigning a rating system to these criteria. These guides could be administered on an annual or semiannual basis to provide progress measures over time.

With respect to the above standards, some would require a binary yes/no response indicating whether or not that specific criterion was addressed and/or achieved while others would be amenable to a Likert type scale requiring qualitative judgment. Examples are presented below:

Binary Rating

	YES	NO
1. All children are screened on a regular basis to identify eligible handicapped children.	___	___
2. The child is involved in the IEP development process.	___	___

Likert Rating

Not Descriptive or True		Moderately Descriptive or True		Very Descriptive or True
1	2	3	4	5

Rating

____ 1. Annual goals and short term objectives are logically and consistently related to strategies to achieve them.

____ 2. Diagnostic information used to develop the IEP yields direct implications for teaching and programming efforts.

A self study guide of this type could be extremely useful to LEAs in the IEP quality control process. Local districts are encouraged to consider development of such a system when appropriate and feasible.

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Appendix A: Examples of Goals and Objectives

The following goals and objectives are designed as acceptable examples of the definitions presented in the text. In addition, the structure of each set of goals and objectives exemplifies the enclosed model for tying IEP planning to interaction.

Example 1:

Annual Goal: Student will master addition of single digit numbers in a vertical format.

Short Term Objective: Given the verbal command to write answers to problems on provided fact sheet of randomly distributed single digit addition problems in a vertical format, the student will write the answers with 100% accuracy at 30 responses per minute.

Daily Objective: Students will master addition of manipulatives in vertical sets (sums to 4) with 100% accuracy.

Example 2:

Annual Goal: Student will master sound blending of all the sounds in the alphabet when randomly presented in pairs and groups of three.

Short Term Objective: Given individual cards with letters printed on them and placed in pairs or threes in random order, and given the command to say the sounds in each group without pausing between the sounds, as rapidly as possible; the student will say the sounds in order, without pausing between the sounds with 100% accuracy at 60 responses per minute.

Daily Objective: Student will blend vowel-consonant combinations n, s, f, m, a, with 100% accuracy.

Example 3:

Annual Goal: Increase math operations.

Short Term Objective: Student will complete one digit multiplication problems with 0-5 as multipliers without a matrix with 100% accuracy.

Daily Objective: Student will master one digit multiplication problems with 1 and 2 as the multiplier with 100% accuracy.